



CRAIG HICKMAN 2022-10-25

DARK COMEDY: THE IRONY OF THE BANAL; OR, THE METAMORPHOSCHIZOLIBIDINAL MACHINE

PHILOFICTION FOSTER WALLACE, LIBIDINAL, MACHINE, POSTHUMANISM

I've noted since 1986 that a good 65% of the people in metropolitan bus terminals between the hours of midnight and 6: 00 A.M. tend to qualify as Lynchian figures— flamboyantly unattractive, enfeebled, grotesque, freighted with a woe out of all proportion to evident circumstances. Or we've all seen people assume sudden and grotesque facial expressions— e.g. like when receiving shocking news, or biting into something that turns out to be foul, or around small kids for no particular reason other than to be weird— but I've determined that a

sudden grotesque facial expression won't qualify as a really Lynchian facial expression unless the expression is held for several moments longer than the circumstances could even possibly warrant, is just held there, fixed and grotesque, until it starts to signify about seventeen different things at once.¹

– David Foster Wallace, *A Supposed Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*



This remark by David Foster Wallace in an essay on the work of film tiger David Lynch typifies the dark comedy of our times. In a brutal world that condones the brutalization of children and adults alike one survives through humor, through the dark and bitter comedy that disturbs rather than puts us back to sleep. This is the biting humor that gets under us, that follows us in our nightmares and keeps us wondering who is the victim, who the perpetrator. If *tragedy* invites us to sympathizes and lament the fate of this brutal world we humans have invented for ourselves, then as *Henri Bergson* once recognized *laughter* disperses such illusions and becomes the 'killer of emotions,' the divider, the slayer who stalks the night keeping the ghosts at bay. Violence lurks under the hood. Like an unbidden guest we find it everywhere. One only needs to open a magazine, a newspaper, turn on the TV, radio, or just take a drive along any freeway in our metalloïd and artificial climes. One can opt for Lynch or Tarantino: "Quentin Tarantino is interested in watching somebody's ear getting cut off; David Lynch is interested in the ear" (166).

Love, lust, revulsion, and allure infect us like visitors from some surreal world of magical affects. At the borderlands of identity we discover *life*: oozy, slimy, viscous, teeming, messy, uncanny life. What does life want? Freud told us in simplistic terms that life wants to return to the inorganic slime pool from which it first arose: the reproduction of life tends ultimately by circuitous route toward that far country of death. For Freud it all came down to this: "What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion" (Beyond the Pleasure Principle). And what about the "man-omlette" (Ben Woodard) of Lacan? Bob Woodard tells us we shouldn't over-idealize this Weissmanian germ, this festering amoeba caught between the intensive pulses of entropy and negentropy, that instead we should go beyond even Zizek's impervious reading in 'Lacan as a reader of Alien' – where the "face hugger functions as the lamella – sacrificing itself to impregnate a goo-trapped victim with a xenomorph" (56, Slime Dynamics). That this, too, is too much Idealism. That disgust is itself too aesthetic, a tribute to the mind – all too human; that beyond the human, or even the thought of the human, lies the organicity of existence itself without *us*. And, this is key: materialism, Woodard suggests, is too concerned with subjectivity and subjects, of humans as Subjects, and that is what separates *materialism* from *realism* (ibid).

57).

In the midst of this dark ride Nick Land wanders in attributing to this downward spiral into organicity telling us in a black comedy of Deleuzian stormtrooper prose that desire has become the “libidinized rift between a disintegrating personal egoism and a deluge of post-human schizophrenia”(342, Fanged Noumena). In our present day libidinized economy (Land) the impersonal force of capital hoodwinks us all in its transmutation as deathdrive, as that ultimate commodification of life in cybersexual machinic pleasure – its “relentless passage to the traumatic disorganization of the biological order” (ibid. 342). Land opens up the machinic egg of time, the bitter truth of our own metamorphosis into turing-machines, the grappling hooks cloning line replicating the truism of our imploded brains.

Eros dissolves definitively into its function as a subprogram of runaway Thanatos at the point that it unreservedly invests technical interfacing with digitally synthesized excitations. The mask of capital exhibited to seduce Eros was pretension to ultimately resolve matters in relation to stimulation or unpleasure, but this has now fallen away, since cybersexualized capital cynically displays its program to replicate a tradable modulation of unpleasure, and thus its unsurpassable addiction to traumatic excitation” (ibid. 324-343).

A mythology for machines who are caught in the tension between 1 and 0 in a binary cosmosis run amok. Maybe the only act of kindness left to us is to make out of the rubbish of the world a metal flower, an aesthetic act that is pure excess, that provides what Ben Woodard calls that connection that provides meaning through a retroactive act, “caused by the interconnectedness and effects of rubbish, of dumb biology” (63, Slime Dynamics). As Woodard states it:

Humans, like any other polyp of living matter, are nothing but heaps of slime slapped together and shaped by the accidents of time and the context of space. The fact that we have evolved self-consciousness should not guarantee or maintain meaning. Meaning is only ever the final gloss on being which when removed does not then dictate mass suicide nor pure apathy. ... The material being of humans, and of all life is a slimy one. Slime is the smudge of reality, the remainder and reminder of the fact that things fall apart. The shining path of humanity is only ever the verminous-like trail of our own oozing across time and space... (66-67, Slime Dynamics).

We're entering that *Age of Replicants* when beyond the thought of the human we slough all vestiges of our former mythologies and prejudices of Selfhood and Subjectivity. As Land reminds us the “replicants have never shared this prejudice ... it is marked out for them that the subject is not the owner of its skin, but a migrant upon its surface, borrowing variable and evanescent identitites from intensities traversed in sensitive space. The replicants drape themselves in wolf-pelts, and cross into berserk zones of alien affect, or melt into data-suits that pulse with digitized matrix traffic streams” (343, Fanged Noumena). If something wicked comes this way its not anything alien to us, it is us thrown onto the world's stark surface, devoid of our once proud mythologies, our grand narratives that shaped us for millennia into a creature we once quaintly

termed “humanity”. Now we enter another age:

Suddenly it's everywhere: a virtual envelopement by recyclones, voodoo economics, neo-nightmares, death-trips, skin-swaps, teraflops, Wintermute-wasted Turing-cops, sensitive silicon, socket-head subversion, polymorphic hybridizations, descending data-storms, and cyborg catwomen stalking amongst the screens. Zaibatsus flip into sentience as the market melts to automatism, politics is cryogenized and dumped into the liquid-helium meat store, drugs migrate onto neurosoft viruses, and immunity is grated-open against jagged reefs of feral AI explosion, Kali culture, digital dance-dependency, black shaminsims, epidemic, and schizolupic break-outs from the bin” (344, Fanged Noumena).

Kate Gompart, the character who plunges us deeply into the annihilating light in *Infinite Jest* describes the ultimate form of depression as *It*:

It is a level of psychic pain wholly incompatible with human life as we know it. It is a sense of radical and thoroughgoing evil not just as a feature but as the essence of conscious existence. It is a sense of poisoning that pervades the self at the self's most elementary levels. It is a nausea of the cells and soul. It is an unnumb intuition in which the world is fully rich and animate and un-map-like and also thoroughly painful and malignant and antagonistic to the self, which depressed self It billows on and coagulates around and wraps in Its black folds and absorbs into Itself, so that an almost mystical unity is achieved with a world every constituent of which means painful harm to the self. Its emotional character, the feeling Gompert describes It as, is probably mostly indescribable except as a sort of double bind in which any/ all of the alternatives we associate with human agency— sitting or standing, doing or resting, speaking or keeping silent, living or dying— are not just unpleasant but literally horrible.

It is also lonely on a level that cannot be conveyed. There is no way Kate Gompert could ever even begin to make someone else understand what clinical depression feels like, not even another person who is herself clinically depressed, because a person in such a state is incapable of empathy with any other living thing. This anhedonic Inability To Identify is also an integral part of It. If a person in physical pain has a hard time attending to anything except that pain, a clinically depressed person cannot even perceive any other person or thing as independent of the universal pain that is digesting her cell by cell. Everything is part of the problem, and there is no solution. It is a hell for one. (695-696)2

With thoughts like this who needs a comedian? In an interview one time Woody Allen spoke of the endless pressure of being funny, of facing audiences day in and day out, of spending 40 minutes of making people laugh, then spending 20 minutes in the dressing room waiting to do it all over for the second or third time in a night. How this pressure to make people forget the banality of their own inane lives (the boredom of it all): the repetitions of their daily existence, – the endless movement between bed and office and grocery store and home and bed again was a pressure that all comedians faced. Why laughter rather than tears? Why do we seek out those that can entertain us with stories of our fallible ways rather than those who will teach us the dire news of this organic monstrosity we call life? Allen tells us it is something intangible: “People

want something else, something infrangible. They want to like the person and find the person funny as a human being. the biggest trap comedians fall into is trying to get by on the basis of their material. That's just hiding behinds jokes.”³

Jerry Lewis said it best: “... in comedy you're naked”(ibid. 309). The comedian allows that truth of the slime-world to come through without masking it with the tragic overtones, instead he allows it to escape into the laughter of the audience as the Real. Under the ruse of comedy we find a whole troupe of eccentric creatures: funnyman, comedian, monologist, comic, clown, zany, satirist, and mimic. The humorist is a creature who can say things that aren't particularly funny in a funny way. A satirist is a teaser, who articulates the disturbing things we'd much less deal with moment to moment, but under the guise of humor we find palatable even if disturbing. Lewis on depression came down to the loop that binds. Why laugh? Why seek out comedy? How to face the dark humor? Depression? *Just talk!* “It made me feel better. That's all it takes when I'm depressed, if I just talk. You don't necessarily have to talk about what you are depressed about – just talk” (326).

If as David Foster Wallace's character, Kate Gompert, says, “Everything is part of the problem, and there is no solution.” Then the only technic for survival is laughter or tears.... or humorous talk! Who cares about the harsh truth when you can enjoy a little laughter? The truth is with us long and hard, but laughter is the momentary pleasure that binds us to each other in the mode of desire. As Alenka Zupancic reminds us:

...comedy involves a strange coincidence of realism ...and utter unrealism.... This unrealistic, “incredible” side of comedy is also related to its proverbial vitalism: a kind of undead, indestructible life, a persistence of something that keeps returning to its place no matter what.... I would suggest that it is precisely here, in this utterly unreasonable insistence, that we find the true realism of comedy, which is not the realism of the “reality principle,” but that of some fundamental discrepancy as constitutive of human beings—a discrepancy which is not posited by comedy as painful or even tragic, but as surprisingly and funnily productive. ... Of course people die, suffer, find themselves in terrible predicaments with no way out. Comedy does not deny all this. What it does is add something else, something which is not simply a belief in the immortality of desire..., but refers to the fact-accessible in everyday experience-of the incongruence of the reality of desire and drive with all those (also quite factual) outlines that determine our supposedly realistic reality. The realism of comedy is the realism of this incongruence. In other words, by drawing on the structures of desire and drive, comedy does not preach that something of our life will or could go on living when we die; rather, it draws our attention to the fact that something of our life lives on its own as we speak, that is to say, at any moment of our life.³

1. Wallace, David Foster (2009-10-31). A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments (pp. 162-163). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.
2. Wallace, David Foster (2009-04-03). Infinite Jest. Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.
3. Alenka Zupancic. The Odd One In: On Comedy (Kindle Locations 2405-2409). Kindle Edition.

taken from here

Foto: Sylvia John

← PREVIOUS NEXT →

META

- CONTACT
- FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX
- IMPRESSUM
- DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

- CATEGORIES
- TAGS
- AUTHORS
- ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

- FACEBOOK
- INSTAGRAM
- TWITTER